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A LETTER ON PRAYER FROM THE DUKE OF ARGYLL.

THOSE whom he teaches have a right to demand that the scientist shall be reverent. Further than this, it is but just to claim that he shall possess the religious spirit. Dealing with conclusions drawn from discoveries of laws extending throughout the whole range of material existence, he should not deny to the intellect which leans on his the least hint of the evidence of God and eternal life. It is with joy that the devout student of science finds this need fully recognized by the Duke of Argyll. The same thing may be said of our distinguished American, John Fiske, whose writings constantly suggest lines of thought parallel to those of Argyll. Superficial thinkers have ignorantly permitted themselves to call any scientist who admits that all things are a process governed by natural law, which is an observed order of facts, instead of a special creation governed by an arbitrary and supernatural will, "materialists," "infidels," and even "atheists." Such designations are absolutely undeserved by these two writers. Religion, pure and simple, the recognizing of a Source of Righteousness, and the worshiping attitude toward that Infinite, are the very root and base, as well as the pinnacle, of all their arguments. But wide as the range of their erudition may be, each approaches the Absolute from almost precisely opposite points. Each reaches an Alpha and Omega, but by paths by no means parallel, and often most radically diverging. Following the Darwinian theory of Evolution from its earliest conclusions of primeval history, ages before the earth became habitable by man, up to the laws of evolution in society, which are proven with the same painstaking care and illustration, Mr. Fiske presents the whole scheme of existence in a clear and ever-deepening and broadening stream of logic, until it flows with majestic current and irresistible force into the ocean of the invisible.

On the other hand, the Duke of Argyll, ever endeavoring to square his reasoning to the lines of Revelation, admits intuition, inspiration, and supernatural influence to be large factors in the development of human character ; takes into consideration spiritual phenomena, and, permeated with the theologic spirit, suggests a science of the invisible, where his contemporary stops on its shores. Mr. Fiske claims to know nothing of that Beyond, in which science loses herself for lack of data. Argyll at least virtually admits his belief that such data can be obtained, and that the depths of the waters of the Unknown can eventually be sounded.

These relative positions, more or less constantly maintained by writers so diverse, yet seem to lead to one end in common, viz., the idea that conscious being must continue to remain conscious being even beyond the time when it shall cease to be connected with a physical organization ; that moral and intellectual superiority will be advantageous hereafter as well as here ; and that righteousness is the only harmonious relationship man can hold with the Author of his being.

Such teaching must inevitably popularize and make gracious and inviting those themes which hitherto have seemed to the general public too abstruse and too unpractical. Whatever leads away from Deity must eventually lose its interest. Chance is neither attractive nor useful. The mind demands sequence, and rejects that which does not appeal to reason. The inherent dignity of human nature denies the theory that a man is but an atom amidst a universe of atoms, without purpose, object, or excuse for being, and without hope, aspiration, or future. By entertaining writers whose exact deductions are still poetic, and whose justice both ways toward the psychical and the physical do not interrupt, but rather emphasize, the rhythmic harmony of their interaction, the reader who understands the grand theme at all must necessarily fall into the swing and flow of their intellectual current, and be borne easily and strongly on to a satisfactory result. Mr. Fiske, proving conclusively that religion is the acme of human superiority by his clear-cut analysis of every phase of conscious or unconscious existence ; and the Duke, enlightening, with sun-like vividness, our conception of the true meaning of terms, words, and definitions, and of all the error and misjudgment occasioned by stupid or malicious misinterpretations, bring us, both

by intuition and reason, to conceive that we are at last on the right road.

After reading the works of the Duke of Argyll, I was puzzled by the positions he took regarding "Grace" and prayer. I ventured to send him a letter. He kindly replied, and in a vein, as I am bound to suppose, which will bear publication. Since the queries which arose in my mind may have occurred to others, I do not hesitate to give the substance of my communication.

"In speaking of prayer," I wrote, "you say, 'The compromise now offered by some philosophers is this: that although the course of external nature is unalterable, yet possibly the phenomena of mind and character may be changed by the Divine agency.' But you instantly question this, and assert that 'the mind is as much under the dominion of law as the body.' How, then, are we to judge of the effects of 'Grace?' I believe the meaning of 'Grace' may be indicated as follows: If a soul supplicate its Creator to improve its condition, in reply to that supplication, if made 'in spirit and in truth,' there comes into that soul a new righteousness; a righteousness which it did not before possess, and which is outside or beyond any physical law acting in the brain. It may be regarded as an *influx* from the invisible, and is supposed to be bestowed in answer to the prayer.

"In other words, this advantage drops on the soul as rain drops on the body. It is not worked out in our own beings. If this is a clear idea of 'Grace,' I cannot comprehend how it can be compatible with law, which, acting on the brain, produces effects limited by its own conditions. Or does the very act of supplication change the law acting in the attributes of intellect, so as to *produce* righteousness? If so, one might as well pray to one's self. Yet experience proves that prayer for spiritual improvement does in marked cases produce, gain, or advance righteousness with surprising rapidity. You do not definitely state your opinion as to the results of prayer, save as it affects the conduct of men. Other superstitions affect men to their moral advantage. I cannot see that you definitely assert your belief that if we make a reasonable appeal to God, one which is in harmony with natural laws but which may be an *especial adjustment* of them in our favor, that it is in His power to alter the regular course of things for our benefit. If we happen to ask for something in natural sequence to previous events we shall probably receive it; but shall we receive it should

it vary by a hair from the Creator's original or present intention? Will anything different occur than would have occurred before we asked? Can, will, or does God adjust matter and spirit for the benefit of one who prays, when, had one not prayed, no adjustment would have taken place? Is there any scientific evidence of reciprocity between God and His creature, by which the unchangeable can be changed, as a child may persuade and alter the intention of his father? If so, is there a definable limit to this adjustment? Is it bounded by law? I ask because I recognize the great significance of the question of mutual relationship between my Heavenly Father and myself. If there is no reciprocity of feeling, sympathy, and understanding, where is the link which connects me with Him? I have noted favorable changes in conditions and in people after having prayed for such. Was this the granting of my wish by God as an outside and adjusting factor, or was it the product of a natural law—the sequence of a concentrated will? If I cannot expect from God any adjustment save that which He made in the beginning of creation, but am without consultation of my desire placed among forces visible and invisible, to which I must adjust myself and which I must manipulate or fail and perish, I feel myself no better than the pen wherewith I write, and my conscious being a delusion and a mockery.”

To these questions and comments, the Duke of Argyll courteously replied with the following letter :

LONDON, November, 22.

MADAM : I have received your letter of the 8th, in which you ask *some* questions which are beyond the reach of human intellect. But one question you put, respecting my own meaning in certain passages of “The Reign of Law,” which you seem to think are incompatible with the belief in the efficacy of prayer in any case. My reply is direct, that you have misunderstood me. The proposition that the mind is subject to “law” does not mean that it is subject to *material* and *physical* law. It only means that the spiritual world has laws of its own, quite as definite and quite as supreme as the laws of the physical world. But this does not in the least affect our belief in prayer, because *one* of the laws of the spiritual world may be (and as Christians believe, must be) that the human soul is in relations and in correspondence with the Divine Spirit, so as to be acted on thereby. The bare intellectual difficulty of understanding *how* events can ever be changed by supplication, consistently with our notions of the Divine fore-knowledge and decrees, is, and must ever remain, an insoluble difficulty to us. But it has always appeared to me that this difficulty equally applies to the case of changes brought about by appeals to the will and voluntary action of our fellow men. We know as a matter of fact that these appeals *do* change purpose, and through purpose *do* change events. Yet theoretically we don't quite see how this familiar experience

is to be reconciled with the proposition that all events are fore-ordained by the Almighty Will. Probably the solution lies in the profound ignorance in which we live as to the real conditions about which we talk when we frame propositions about "Foreknowledge" and "Decrees." We are probably in a great measure *thinking nonsense* when we frame words and sentences to express the relations between the Divine Mind, or the Supreme Will, and the events which (to us) take place in time. We may well be content to "know," that "by marked cases as examples, this supplication for spiritual improvement will gain or produce or advance the graces of human character with surprising rapidity." We also know by a perfect consciousness that this effect is not produced by "*praying to ourselves*," and could not be produced if we thought we had no one else to pray to. I must beg you to excuse a very hasty letter, dealing, of course, very inadequately with one of the most difficult and profound of all subjects. I am much gratified by the kind expressions you employ in reference to the value of my books to those who are troubled on such questions. My book called "The Unity of Nature," is a further development of the same subject (as "The Reign of Law"), and approaches more nearly the main end: "Law in Theology."

Your Obedient Servant,
ARGYLL.

MRS. CORA LINN DANIELS,
FRANKLIN, Mass.

Mr. Fiske's method of stating that the mind is not subject to physical law is expressed thus:

"Modern discovery, so far from bridging over the chasm between Mind and Matter, tends rather to exhibit the distinction between them as absolute."

Starting with the questions, "What is matter? What is mind?" one can hardly bring together two instructors who can give better, more concise, more erudite, more diverse, or more satisfactory answers. The climax of Argyll's thinking, so far as is published in "The Unity of Nature," is reached thus:

"We come to understand that the processes of development or of creation, whatever they may have been, which culminated in such a being as Man, are processes wholly governed and directed by a Law of adjustment between the higher truths it concerns him to know and the evolution of faculties by which alone he could be enabled to apprehend them. There is no difficulty in conceiving these processes carried to *the most perfect consummation*."

With equal reverence, and after his usual profound course of reasoning, the American serenely ends "The Idea of God" thus:

"The events of the universe are not the work of chance, neither are they the outcome of blind necessity. Practically, there is a purpose in the world, whereof it is our highest duty to learn the lesson. When from the dawn of life we see all things working together toward the evolution of the highest spiritual attributes of Man, we know, however the words may stumble in which we try to say it, that God is in the deepest sense a moral Being. The everlasting source of phenomena is none other than the Infinite Power which makes for righteousness."

CORA LINN DANIELS.